

# **Operational Protection.....Crystal Ball or Abstract Art?**

**By  
CDR Chris Sinnett**

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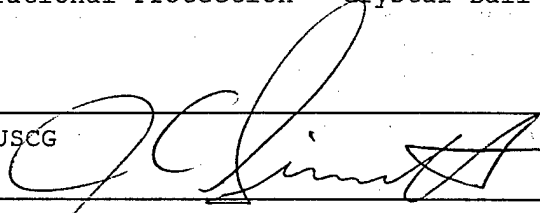
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## **Introduction**

Prior to 1996 the term Force Protection was not as widely recognized as it is today. But on June 25<sup>th</sup> of that year, a terrorist bombing of the Khobar Towers housing complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia claimed the lives of nineteen U.S. airmen and wounded another five hundred.<sup>1</sup> Since then, protection of American and friendly forces has assumed the quality of a mantra and the issue has received so much emphasis in the media that the United States is often labeled as excessively casualty averse.

Whether or not one can be overly casualty averse is a topic for debate. But one thing which is certain is that every commander wants to maintain the quantity and quality of his troops and material in order to maintain the force's fighting capability. Much has been written from the tactical perspective about protecting one's forces, but there is a dearth of discussion about force protection from the Theater Commander-in-Chief's (CINC's) perspective. But operational protection is not an easy function to grasp and execute. Its many components are appropriately tasked to different elements of the joint staff and no single staff element is doctrinally assigned oversight for successful execution of the operational protection function. The title "Operational Protection - Crystal Ball or Abstract Art?" is really a question about whether or not CINC's have the ability to clearly see the operational protection status of their forces or whether they are faced with a picture of blurred lines and murky reports. This paper argues that there is insufficient coordination between and oversight of joint staff elements involved in operational protection issues. It is therefore virtually impossible to provide a single, coherent picture of the operational protection status within a theater.

In addressing this coordination issue, an overview of the elements of operational protection and existing force protection doctrine will prove useful. Three different options for staff organization and management will then be compared and followed by a proposal for measuring operational protection that will allow a CINC to gage his or her operational protection status at any given time. Final conclusions will support four specific recommendations for CINCs and the Services to consider as part of the debate on operational protection. Operational protection appears to be a technology related growth industry (e.g. Theater Missile Defense) and elements of operational protection are very much in the public's eye.

An underlying theme to this discussion is that operational protection as a whole is not the state of being casualty averse. It is that body of actions taken to preserve the combat effectiveness of one's own and friendly forces by protecting them from any manner of harm, be it enemy action, inhospitable environment or any influence which has a negative impact on the force's ability to fight and win.

## **Elements of Operational Protection**

Vego states that operational protection consists of all the actions and measures taken to counter the enemy's firepower and operational maneuver capabilities so as to make one's forces and assets difficult for the opponent to locate, strike and destroy. It also aims at protecting one's own forces from terrorist acts and natural disasters and extends to friendly forces as well as civil infrastructure during Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW).<sup>ii</sup> Normally, tactical commanders are responsible for providing security against surprise enemy maneuvers, maintaining camouflage discipline, fortifying

fighting positions, conducting rapid movements, suppressing enemy weapons, organizing air defense, and taking other measures to prevent unnecessary combat losses.<sup>iii</sup>

Operational commanders take similar actions and measures but accomplish them theater-wide. They are responsible for protecting friendly forces from operational-level maneuver and concentrated enemy air support. Air superiority operations, theater-wide air defense systems, and protection of air bases are critically important to maximize combat power at the operational level. Because forces and assets are finite, it's not possible to provide protection to all forces and facilities in a given theater. Therefore, the operational commander must find a balance between what is necessary and what is possible to protect.<sup>iv</sup>

But much of the discussion of operational protection is usually geared towards one of the individual components of operational protection, not the function as a whole. This is understandable because operational protection is in a sense an umbrella function that covers or at least permeates all of the other operational functions. Thus, someone involved in operational command and control or operational logistics will be very involved in the protection of their own capabilities but they may have little involvement or consideration in the operational protection of other force elements.

A partial list of operational protection components includes: air defense; operational deception; protection from terrorist acts; and, protection of military dependents and other noncombatants.<sup>v</sup> This incomplete list illustrates one of the major challenges facing today's joint staffs. Many of these operational protection components are the responsibility of different staff elements and multiple services, and there isn't a doctrinally uniform picture of who should be thinking of these tasks as parts of a whole.

As an example, in one scenario the service responsible for area missile defense might be the Army with a Patriot missile battery while in another situation it's the Navy with an Aegis cruiser. The threat against the Army location might be constant until an enemy is defeated while the threat against the cruiser's position along a Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) is temporary and soon disappears. Because of the infinite permutations of enemy threats against friendly forces and subsequent friendly responses, it's difficult to have a broad yet clear understanding of just how protected the CINC's forces are.

Army commanders might state that FM 100-5 addresses their force protection issues by defining the four pillars of OPSEC, health and morale, safety, and avoidance of fratricide.<sup>vi</sup> Air Force commanders can look to Air Force Doctrine Document 1 for similar guidance but all they'll discover is a short mention of security as part of a review of the principles of war.<sup>vii</sup> The Navy and Marine Corps will basically discover that in Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (NDP 1) there is little specific mention of force protection per se but that the theme is embedded throughout the pub and in the Navy Department's entire history.<sup>viii</sup> So where does the jump from tactical or unit level protection to theater-wide operational protection take place? At the CINC's joint staff. But why is there the possibility that some elements of operational protection might fall through the cracks? Because all of the joint staff members came from their respective services and each person carries the institutional and cultural thought processes from that service.

Joint Pub 0-2 states that, "A Joint Force Commander is authorized to organize the staff and assign responsibilities to individual Service members assigned to the staff as deemed necessary to ensure unity of effort and accomplishment of assigned missions."<sup>ix</sup>

Couple this authority with the information contained in the UJTL (Uniform Joint Task List - CJCSM 3500.04B) and the problem seems imminently solvable. All of the specific tasks for operational protection with associated MOEs (Measures of Effectiveness) are listed and explained for the joint staff. All that remains is to assign the tasks to the appropriate joint staff element and execute the tasks. But before marching down the path to instant success, one would be well advised to remember Clausewitz's statement that, "Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult."<sup>x</sup>

Staff work in peacetime is trying. During a crisis situation the workload is staggering and staff elements juggle huge volumes of critically important work in support of friendly forces. In order to ensure that operational protection is viewed and managed as a whole, there needs to be an appropriate and consistent level of coordination and oversight at the staff level. But what is an appropriate level of oversight? The answer is that it depends on the situation. For a Grenada sized operation against an enemy with comparatively limited force, operational protection will be less complex than during a Gulf War. For a protracted conflict like Vietnam or Korea, operational protection issues will rise to greater levels of importance and will receive the attention of elected officials and the public back home. The appropriate staffing organization for dealing with operational protection will have to be decided by the CINC when the crisis occurs, and domestic and coalition politics might be involved in deciding portions of that organizational structure.

### **Staffing Options**

Three different methods of organizing and tasking an operational level staff to provide operational force protection come readily to mind. First is to let subordinate



commanders provide whatever level of protection they feel is appropriate and feasible. Second is to assign an Operational Force Protection Czar with the authority to task staff elements and coordinate analysis of and response to operational protection issues. Third is to create a separate cell within the staff to perform the mission.

One of the best attributes of the first option is that the commander who is closest to the threat is the one who best understands the organic capabilities of assigned forces. This commander has a much clearer picture of the risk or gap that exists between a threat to a force or critical installation under their control and their ability to defeat that threat. Ideally, every commander in theater would know the threat they were facing whether they were delivering a \$2 billion load of warfighting supplies via a Military Sealift Command (MSC) ship, trucking ammunition through an area of operations (AO) to an artillery battalion, protecting a critical airfield that is distant from the enemy's forces, or preparing to attack the enemy main force. The commander would notify the chain of command when risk was deemed excessive and would request additional forces. These forces (if available) would be assigned against the specific threat and would help ensure the maintenance and sustainability of the fighting force. As threat levels changed, these supporting forces could be shifted to other areas as needed. There are several downfalls to this approach. One is that various individual commanders may not understand the operational or strategic impact that will result from a successful enemy attack on a given day's particular mission. This could result in a commander accepting a force protection posture that is inadequate when compared to the importance of a specific mission.

For example, every MSC ship is important but if a port is attacked when an operationally significant cargo is being offloaded as opposed to a cargo of lesser

significance (e.g. the first shipload of tanks versus the twentieth shipload of MREs), then the timing of an entire campaign can be severely affected. A second problem exists because a protection gap can develop between commands. Forces and material are protected once under the control of a particular command but every transition from one command to another is an opportunity for someone or something to be unprotected for a short period of time. This problem is more applicable to supplies and material than to people but it results in an opportunity for the enemy in either case. A third downfall is that a commander is not likely to offer up protection elements of his force just because the security threat has decreased in his area. This can result in other commanders requesting additional force protection elements and being told that there aren't any left to distribute.

Overall, this option will tend to result in a tactical and possibly fragmented approach to operational level force protection and runs the risk of successful enemy exploitation of gaps and insufficient levels of protection.

Designating an Operational Force Protection Czar whether by title or simply by assigning tasks offers some definite benefits over the first option. The majority of the benefit would come from: improved knowledge of the various threats throughout the theater; better knowledge of the various operational force protection elements and their capabilities and limitations throughout the theater; and, knowledge of which theater elements were critical and worth greater protection even if it came at increased risk to other friendly forces. Having a focal point for this information would then result in closer coordination and better execution of operational force protection efforts. As an example, the Protection Czar would be heavily engaged with the intelligence, planning, logistics and operations staffs to identify threats to forces, systems and material along their entire

deployment route from the U.S. to the theater of war, and to shift protection forces as appropriate to deny the enemy the ability to harm friendly assets. One downside to this approach is that the Protection Czar becomes one more person with tasking authority on an already highly-tasked staff. At some point the Czar will probably wind up competing against other commanders for staff resources and the potential for decisions to be made with incomplete information will grow.

The third option, creating a special staff cell to handle operational force protection issues directly addresses the downside to option two mentioned above. By having an intelligence and assessment capability combined with full time representation of the other staff or service elements of the joint force, all of the tasks within section OP-6 of the Uniform Joint Task List (UJTL) can be executed. This staff would be able to monitor issues ranging from air, space and missile defense (OP 6.1.1) to assessments of operational deception plans (OP 6.4.3) and protection/security of operationally critical installations, facilities and systems (OP 6 5 3) just to name a few.<sup>xi</sup>

Like many propositions that require additional bodies or dollars, this option is likely to face opposition from those who decry any growth in staff size. They will argue that each joint force commander should identify and assign appropriate tasks from the UJTL to the various staff functions, and they will be correct. But they will be ignoring a significant part of the issue. Many UJTL task groupings fit cleanly within a specific staff function, such as the OP 2 tasks that fall within the J-2's responsibility. But operational force protection crosses the boundary of every staff function which is a bonus and a problem at the same time. It's a bonus because everyone is affected by operational force protection and they have a vested interest in its success. It's a problem because it's

difficult for any one staff element to maintain the complete operational protection picture when they're dealing with the daily business of military operations and they only see their particular part of the operational protection puzzle.

## Evaluating Operational Protection

Regardless of how a joint staff is organized and tasked with the various elements of operational protection, one thing that is needed is a methodology for generating a macro measure of operational protection status. There is nothing new in the components of the following model (see fig 1.), but the particular joining of threat information with UJTL tasks and MOEs may offer a new way to envision operational protection at the CINC level.

Military System Component	UJTL Task	Potential Threat Impact	Threat Probability	Threat Level	Current Protection Capability	Operational Protection Factor
SLOC - San Diego to Hawaii	OP 6.5.4	1	1	1	5	5
FOB Pusan	OP 6.5.3	5	3	15	3	45

Fig. 1

Assume that either an Operational Protection Czar or a special Operational Protection Cell within the staff has been designated for upcoming military actions. The cell begins by looking at the geography of the theater, proposed operations, logistics support plans and the friendly infrastructure that will be created or used during the conflict. Threat intelligence is then gathered regarding enemy capabilities or environmental threats that exist or could exist or be brought to bear along lines of communication, at bases, in the rear area, etc. For each component of the involved military system (forces, bases, LOCs, etc.) the potential impact of possible threats such as

missile or tank attacks is developed and assigned a value from one to five where one represents a low impact and five is a significant impact.

Next, a threat probability factor of one to five is assigned to each component that describes how likely it is that the component, possibly a base of operations, will actually face the threat and have to protect itself. A value of one means that there is a low probability that the component will face the threat.

Column five is the threat level and is the product of the threat impact and the threat probability. Running a scale of one to twenty-five, low numbers here mean a lesser chance of facing a significant threat to the force.

Column six measures the component's existing ability to protect itself against the possible threats. The scale is reversed here with a value of five meaning that there is no organic capability to protect against the threat. An example would be a newly established base of operations which faced a scud threat but had no missile defense capability yet in place and operational.

The product of columns five and six yields the operational protection factor which on a scale of 1-125 indicates relative levels of operational vulnerability throughout the theater.

There are no tripwire values associated with this model and its utility lies in giving the operational protection cell or Czar a reasonable starting point for communicating with the other staff elements who are managing the various missions and functions. If further investigation confirms significant vulnerabilities, steps can be taken to address the situation.

This model is only part of the solution, however. Appropriate MOEs need to be linked to each operational protection task and tracked in order to monitor the operational protection status. The latest version of the UJTL just released in November 1999 now groups approved MOEs with the definitions and explanations of each specific task. For task OP 6.5.4 the MOEs include: hours required to restore the LOC following interruption; minutes required for rapid reaction forces to reach the point of LOC attack; and, percent of traffic flow on LOCs interrupted by hostile action.<sup>xii</sup>

The compilation of the operational threat model and an MOE monitoring matrix will be a powerful tool albeit a very manpower intensive one to operate. As Network Centric Warfare concepts and systems are developed and made operational, this operational protection model could be incorporated into the CINC's network and result in major manpower savings. The CINC, if he or she is so inclined, will at least have the ability to receive a daily report on operational protection and vulnerability levels and will now have information available to assist with force requests and assignment decisions that extend beyond the traditional force on force analysis.

This information would also play a significant role in allowing the CINC to respond to political concerns, both domestic and coalition, regarding operational protection of friendly forces.

## **Conclusion**

Today's joint staff organization is doctrinally shaped around the functional concept with the various elements covering personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, planning, and C4. Because operational protection is an operational function which involves each of

the standard staff functions, and because its components must compete with other missions for staff resources, the existing staff organization is not ideal for addressing operational protection issues and completing operational protection tasks. The 1996 Khobar Towers bombing clearly indicates that this type of staff failure is possible and that it can result in tremendous costs to the country.

Existing service doctrines tend to focus on the tactical level of force protection when they mention it at all. The Army and the Marines clearly head the list of services who inculcate force protection in their members from the beginning of their career. The Air Force has made increased strides in this area since Khobar Towers<sup>xiii</sup> and although the Navy doesn't specifically address force protection as such in NDP 1, it does discuss power projection and sea control which are certainly intertwined with many elements of force protection and operational protection.

Joint Doctrine Pub 3-0 directs Joint Force Commanders to strive to conserve the fighting potential of the joint force and lists the following components of operational protection: protection from the enemy's firepower and maneuver; health, welfare, morale and maintenance; safety; and, prevention of fratricide.<sup>xiv</sup> This is almost an exact copy of the Army's protection doctrine in FM 100-5 and it's unfortunate that there isn't at least some verbiage in JP 3-0 to differentiate between the tactical and operational levels of force protection.

The conclusions drawn are that: omissions or failures by joint staff elements can have extremely negative impacts on the fighting potential of the joint force; the operational function known as operational protection has many of its components and tasks spread out across different joint staff elements; that operational protection tasks compete against

other tasks which may be deemed more critical when apportioning staff resources; and, that the existing joint staff organization if left unmodified is not ideal for executing the operational protection function.

To address these shortcomings with operational protection, the CINC should assign an appropriate coordination and oversight position on the joint staff at the beginning of every crisis. Whether this operational protection position is an assignment to an existing staffer or consists of bringing in an additional person with separate staff personnel will be dependent on the particular circumstances and conditions of the crisis. Second, the joint community needs to include the tenets of operational protection more actively throughout the family of joint pubs, and the services need to bring operational protection into the mainstream within service doctrine. Third, the acquisition process needs to stay connected with the operational functions, and capabilities for automatic reporting and monitoring of operational protection should be incorporated into future systems (as well as retrofitted into current systems if possible). Finally, the services and the public as a whole need to be taught that operational level force protection is merely the concept of maintaining the fighting potential of all friendly forces, and that casualty aversion is a catchy phrase which has become a political hot-potato and has received much more media attention than it deserves.



## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Kenneth M. Freeman, "Force Protection After Next," (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA:1998), p.1.
- <sup>ii</sup> Milan Vego, "On Operational Art," (Unpublished Compilation of Research Papers, 4<sup>th</sup> Draft, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI:1999), p.323.
- <sup>iii</sup> Chet Helms, "Operational Functions," (Unpublished Consolidation of Information from Milan Vego's 4<sup>th</sup> Draft of "On Operational Art," U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI:1999), p.19.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid, p.19.
- <sup>v</sup> Ibid, p.19.
- <sup>vi</sup> Army Department, Operations, FM 100-5 (Washington:1993), p. 2-10.
- <sup>vii</sup> Air Force Department, Air Force Basic Doctrine, Air Force Doctrine Document 1 (Washington:1997), p. 18.
- <sup>viii</sup> Navy Department, Naval Warfare, Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (Washington:1994), p. 26.
- <sup>ix</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Unified Action Armed Forces, (Joint Pub 0-2) (Washington, D.C.: February 24, 1995), p. IV-12.
- <sup>x</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans., Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1976), p. 119.
- <sup>xi</sup> The complete list of UJTL OP 6 tasks is provided in Appendix A.
- <sup>xii</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Universal Joint Task List, CJCSM 3500.04B, (Washington:1999), p. 2-435.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Kenneth M. Freeman, "Force Protection After Next," (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA:1998), p. 17.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations (Joint Pub 3-0) (Washington, D.C.: February 1, 1995), p. IV-6.

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## OP 6 PROVIDE OPERATIONAL FORCE PROTECTION

### Provide Operational Air, Space, and Missile Defense OP 6.1

- OP 6.1.1 Process/Allocate Operational Aerospace Targets
- OP 6.1.2 Integrate Joint/Multinational Operational Aerospace Defense
- OP 6.1.3 Provide Aerospace Control
- OP 6.1.3.1 Employ Positive Control Measures
- OP 6.1.3.2 Employ Procedural Control Measures
- OP 6.1.4 Counter Enemy Air Attack (Defensive Counterair (DCA)) in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)
- OP 6.1.5 Conduct Joint Operations Area (JOA) Missile Defense
- OP 6.1.6 Conduct Tactical Warning and Attack Assessment in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)

### Provide Protection for Operational Forces, Means, and Noncombatants OP 6.2

- OP 6.2.1 Prepare Operationally Significant Defenses
- OP 6.2.2 Remove Operationally Significant Hazards
- OP 6.2.3 Protect Use of Electromagnetic Spectrum in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)
- OP 6.2.4 Protect Use of the Acoustic Spectrum in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)
- OP 6.2.5 Moved to: OP 5.1.11
- OP 6.2.6 Conduct Evacuation of Noncombatants from the Joint Operations Area (JOA)
- OP 6.2.7 Moved to: OP 4.7.8
- OP 6.2.8 Establish NBC Protection in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)
- OP 6.2.9 Coordinate and Conduct Personnel Recovery
- OP 6.2.9.1 Provide Civil Search and Rescue
- OP 6.2.9.2 Provide Combat Search and Rescue
- OP 6.2.9.3 Support Evasion and Escape in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)
- OP 6.2.10 Develop and Execute Actions to Control Pollution and Hazardous Materials
- OP 6.2.11 Provide Counterdeception Operations
- OP 6.2.12 Provide Counter-Psychological Operations
- OP 6.1.13 Conduct Countermine Activities
- OP 6.1.14 Employ Operations Security (OPSEC) in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)

## OP 6 PROVIDE OPERATIONAL FORCE PROTECTION

### Protect Systems and Capabilities in the Joint Operations Area (JOA) OP 6.3

OP 6.3.1  
Moved to OP 6.2.14

OP 6.3.2  
Supervise Communications Security (COMSEC)

OP 6.3.3  
Employ Electronics Security in the Joint Operation Area (JOA) for Operational Forces

OP 6.3.4  
Protect Information Systems in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)

OP 6.3.5  
Coordinate Concealment of Forces/Facilities

### Conduct Military Deception in Support of Subordinate Campaigns and Major Operations OP 6.4

OP 6.4.1  
Develop Operational Deception Plan

OP 6.4.2  
Conduct Operational Deception

OP 6.4.3  
Assess Effect of Operational Deception Plan

### Provide Security for Operational Forces and Means OP 6.5

OP 6.5.1  
Provide Counterintelligence in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)

OP 6.5.2  
Protect and Secure Flanks, Rear Areas, and COMMZ in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)

OP 6.5.3  
Protect/Secure Operationally Critical Installations, Facilities, and Systems

OP 6.5.4  
Protect and Secure Air, Land, and Sea LOCs in the Joint Operations Area (JOA)

OP 6.5.5  
Integrate Host-Nation Security Forces and Means